

# **Evaluating the Employer Branding Mix Model: A Study in the Spanish Healthcare Sector**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose.** This research examines the applicability of the Employer Branding (EB) Mix model developed by Rayón et al. (2022), one of the few empirically validated models, to promote organizational commitment within the context of the Spanish healthcare sector.

**Methodology.** A questionnaire was administered to 310 employees of a national company in the Spanish healthcare sector. Several multiple regression models were run between the EB dimensions and those of employees' organizational commitment.

**Findings.** The results show that the elements of the EB Mix model have a positive relationship with employee's commitment, especially affective and value commitment.

**Limitations/Implications.** The existence of causality cannot be affirmed, in view of the sectional design with a single sample taken from the Spanish private healthcare sector. Additionally, it would be worth extending the analysis of the effect of the EB Mix model on the behavior of potential employees.

**Practical implications.** This research is extremely relevant, given that it can help organizations in the health sector to implement EB programs. The model is an effective tool for retaining human talent and can generate a competitive advantage for organizations that use it.

**Originality.** The EB Mix model presents a conceptually-based and empirically validated model that incorporates the perception of employees as co-creators of the internal brand, which promotes the democratization of organizations and includes the 4 Ps of the marketing mix.

**Keywords:** Employer branding, employees' organizational commitment, multiple regression models, healthcare sector.

## Introduction

In recent years, the demand for health and social care is increasing. It is predicted that population growth, demographic and epidemiological changes, and the aging of the current healthcare workforce will lead to the creation of approximately 40 million jobs in the global healthcare workforce by 2030 (WHO, 2022a).

Nonetheless, the report issued by the World Health Organization Secretariat warns of a global shortage of health workers and a mismatch between demand, needs and supply, and forecasts a shortfall of 18 million health workers by 2030 (WHO, 2022b). In this context, it is important to attract, involve, and retain the workforce (Chhabra, 2015; García del Junco and Brás dos Santos, 2008), because a "committed workforce is, together with the brand, the most important intangible asset for companies in the 21st century" (Gavilán *et al.*, 2014, p. 60).

One of these intangible assets that has aroused great interest in the applied field to attract and retain talent is employer branding (EB) (Edwards, 2010). However, its theoretical basis is limited from a scientific perspective and a model is needed to analyze the impact of EB on organizational processes, both theoretically and empirically.

Rayón *et al.* (2022) have recently developed an Employer Branding (EB) model. The Employer Branding Mix for the healthcare sector. This model is stated as a lasting remedy for the talent shortage issue, offering an efficient means to attract, hire, and retain essential profiles.

Based on this model, the main goal of the present research is to investigate the relationship between EB Mix (Rayón *et al.*, 2022) and employees' organizational commitment in order to analyze empirically the effect of the organizations' EB on processes linked to talent retention in the Spanish healthcare sector. Specifically, our research delves into examining the impact of Employer Branding on the commitment of current employees. This focus is driven by the understanding that as these employees strengthen their bonds with the organization, they naturally evolve into influential ambassadors for the employer's brand (Kanwal and Van Hoyer, 2023). This, in turn, not only enhances their commitment but also significantly contributes to attracting new talent to the organization.

Additionally, recovering the investment in recruiting, training, and cultivating top talents is contingent upon their sustained tenure within the organization, allowing for a meaningful return on the initial investment (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). In this context, employees' commitment is understood in equivalent terms to what is considered "customer loyalty" in marketing.

## **Theoretical background**

### *From the Brand to the Employer Branding*

The brand is one of the most valuable assets of a company, and its management has become a fundamental activity in many organizations. Kotler et al. (2023) define brand as

a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of these that identifies the maker or seller of a product or service. Consumers view a brand as an important part of a product, and branding can add value to a consumer's purchase. Customers attach meanings to brands and develop brand relationships. As a result, brands have meaning well beyond a product's physical attributes (p. 255).

Although organizations usually focus their brand building efforts on the development of products and services, branding can also be applied to the employees, given to the term Employer Branding (EB).

Ambler and Barrow (1996) coined the term Employer Branding, as a process of identifying and creating the company brand message and applying traditional marketing principles to the condition itself of being an employer of choice, thereby attracting and retaining the most highly qualified employees (Kanwal and Van Hoyer, 2023; Sutherland *et al.*, 2002).

As stated by Theurer *et al.* (2018), there are four limitations in the study of EB: a) a lack of distinction between the employer brand and the process of employer branding; b) terminological dispersion (vg. employer brand equity, brand identity, employer brand, or brand image, among others); and c) a lack of agreement regarding the specific target audience for employer branding (potential vs. current employees).

These limitations are reflected in the Employer Branding (EB) models that have been developed. In the following section, we analyze the main models and their contributions. Subsequently, the EB Mix model (Rayón *et al.*, 2022) is introduced and justified, serving as the conceptual foundation for the current research. This model examines the process of generating Employer Branding, utilizes marketing mix concepts to conceptualize the model's components, and focuses on the study of current employees.

### ***Employer Branding Models***

One of the seminal works on EB is the one of Ambler and Barrow (1996). In their qualitative study based on employer interviews, they highlighted that, although the concept of Employer

Branding existed implicitly in some organizations, its definition was fuzzy. Furthermore, they emphasized that the value of this concept laid in bridging the discipline and theory of marketing with the Human Resources function.

From the initial work of Ambler and Barrow (1996), different models have been proposed to establish an organizational value proposition (the product or employer brand) that impacts both current and potential employees. One of the first models was described by Miles and Mangold (2008). It aims to generate a sense of brand image among the employees so that they become the agents who transmit it to the company's customers and potential employees. In the same sense, the Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) model was developed from a marketing perspective. For these authors, EB is a process of constructing and communicating the company's identity (brand identity), characterized by making a company unique, identifiable, and desirable as an employer. The advantage of this theoretical model lies on leveraging employer branding as a unifying framework, providing a structured avenue to align diverse employee recruitment and retention efforts within a cohesive human resource strategy. Integrating recruitment, staffing, training, development, and career management activities under this unified approach produces a distinctly more impactful result than each process operating independently.

Drawing on the work of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Barrow and Mosley (2005) developed a model in which they propose an integrated management of the brand by the human resources and marketing departments, in what they call the Integrated Service Brand Model (Mosley, 2007). This model considers it essential for organizations to generate a culture in which all their employees are aligned, making it the aspect of internal cohesion that has to be projected outside the organization and thus establishing a direct relationship between employer brand management and the customer experience.

Except for Ambler and Barrow (1996), all these models are characterized by being theoretical proposals that have not been empirically tested. Two years later, Merz *et al.* (2009) developed a model that defined EB as brand awareness, brand image and brand experience. They demonstrated that EB results in loyalty, a decrease in the intention to leave, and an enhanced appeal of the company as an employer by means of employer brand value (EBV, Keller, 2001). Its main contribution lies in the fact that it was the first quantitatively supported model. However, the study sample had limitations because it consisted of a group of recent graduates, with scarce or no work experience.

Subsequently, King and Grace (2008) empirically tested an EB model addressed to employees in the service sector. This model provides insight into how organizations can not only effectively manage the internal process of brand building but also, more importantly, measure the subsequent organizational benefits and impact on employees. Hence, one of its main contributions is identified as being the way it incorporates the employee's perspective when analyzing brand value, given that the literature on branding management has given this little consideration so far (Fernández Lores *et al.*, 2014).

Finally, Edwards and Edwards (2013) propose a longitudinal study in which they use the marketing mix model to analyze the impact of two of the 4 component (McCarthy, 1960), the product (the unique employment experience) and the price (discretionary efforts) on employees' retention in multinational acquisition contexts. The authors pointed out that it is important to analyze the different components of the concept EB to acquire a deeper insight in organizational and individual processes.

The model developed by Rayón *et al.* (2022) is based on the same approach, but it has three additional values. Firstly, it is characterized by being a conceptually based and empirically validated model through inter-rate adjustment, among 30 experts in organizational management. Secondly, the perception of the employees as customers who participate and co-create the internal brand and enrich the organization through their contributions is found to be an essential means of empowering the said employees. Finally, in contrast to Edwards and Edwards (2013), Rayon's *et al.* (2022) model includes the 4 components of the marketing mix model (product, price, place and promotion) proposed by McCarthy (1960). The component parts of the EB Mix are defined as follows:

- The Product promoted and distributed through EB is the employment experience, which is an inseparable consequence of what the company offers its employees (the offering). An important part of this offering is intangible, based on the values, mission and vision of the company.
- The Price that the employees pay to enjoy this product is the difference in the effort they make or the work they do, whose degree of specialization, intensity and/or difficulty will be proportional to the benefits associated with acquiring the product.
- The Place, the distribution of the product, is enabled by two main facilitators: the adoption of a flexible organizational structure and the deployment a participative leadership.

- Promotion implies communicating the particularities of the product, which involves taking into account the communication systems and practices used by the organization at an internal level.

### ***Employees' organizational commitment***

The model proposed by Rayón et al. (2022) is presented as a long-term solution to the talent shortage problem on the healthcare sector, providing an effective approach to attract, recruit, and retain key profiles. In the present research we focus on the effect of EB on retention by means of employees' organizational commitment.

According to Mowday *et al.* (1982) research on organizational commitment can be summarized from two perspectives: attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal commitment is defined as a psychological link between individuals and the organization, encompassing three dimensions: affective commitment (individual identification and involvement with the organization), instrumental commitment (individual dependence on extrinsic incentives from the organization), and normative commitment (cognitive alignment between the organization's values/goals and individuals) (Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Reichers, 1986).

On other hand, behavioral commitment is defined as employees' willingness to consistently exhibit specific behaviors with favorable consequences for the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Initially the authors presented two types, affective and continuous commitment, later introduced a multidimensional model, adding normative commitment. Similar to Meyer and Allen (1991), O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) proposed two commitment types: one related to continuous commitment (from Meyer and Allen, 1991), guiding employees to adhere to organizational norms and procedures, and the other being affective, associated with the identification and internalization of the organization's values and goals.

Drawing from Meyer and Allen (1991), as well O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), and aiming for a more comprehensive model integrating both attitudinal and behavioral perspectives, Quijano *et al.* (2000) designed the Human System Audit (ASH) model, in which the present research is based. This model defines organizational commitment as "a psychological link that employees develop towards the organization for different reasons" (Quijano *et al.*, 2000, p. 34), and includes the dimensions of need, exchange, affective and values commitment. The need and exchange commitment described in the ASH model overlaps with Meyer and Allen's continuance commitment (1991). On the other hand, exchange can be experienced positively, in an atmosphere of equity and satisfaction with the agreed-upon transactions (exchange

commitment), or unsatisfactorily, with a perception of inequity, which results in the employees being willing or intending to leave as soon as possible (need commitment).

Affective commitment is defined as the emotional bond between individuals and their organization, and value commitment is based on the employees' personal identification with the values and goals of the organization, which they internalize to make them their own (Quijano *et al.*, 2000). The affective and the value commitment described in the ASH model are closely linked with Meyer and Allen's affective and normative commitment.

### ***Employer branding and employees' organizational commitment***

Various theoretical (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Merz *et al.*, 2009) and empirical (Fernández Lores *et al.*, 2014) scientific studies coincide in including employees' commitment as a priority objective and direct consequence of the implementation of employer branding strategies. However, none has focused on empirically analyzing the relationship between EB dimensions and employees' organizational commitment based on a validated scientific model. We analyze this relationship below.

### ***Product and employees' organizational commitment***

The EB Mix model (Rayón *et al.*, 2022) considers the product a company offers its employees to be the experience of working in that company, which involves a combination of tangible and intangible elements.

The tangible elements, such as the compensation package, become the means that ultimately attracts and retains the right employees, continually motivating them to perform well in the organization (Osorio, 2016). Intangible elements, such as values, organizational identity, and reputation, are characterized by their abstract nature, which sometimes makes it difficult for employees to recognize and understand them. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) point out that employees must understand the brand in order to be able to identify with it. Hence, its intangible elements must be clearly explained. In turn, this understanding of the brand has a significantly positive effect on employees' organizational commitment (King, 2010; King and Grace, 2008; Piehler *et al.*, 2016). For these reasons, to be committed employees need to know and be aligned with values, vision, and mission of their organization, named the Employer Value Proposition (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015).

Following the previous research, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H1- The offering that a company makes to its current employees (product) has a positive relationship with their organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective, and values commitment, and decreased need commitment).*

#### *Price and organizational employees' commitment*

In the exchange relationship established between employer and employee, the latter offers his or her effort in exchange for obtaining and enjoying the company's offering. Based on the theory of equity (Adams, 1965), employees may decide to moderate or increase their work effort depending on the rewards they receive.

Reciprocity in the exchange relationship between employers and employees bears a clear relationship to commitment. Employees feel emotionally attached to their organization and willingly work for it when they perceive that the organization is ready to fulfill its responsibilities (psychological contract). The match between the employee's perception of psychological contract fulfillment by the employer and the employer's perception of psychological contract fulfillment by the employee has been termed psychological contract congruence (Kim *et al.*, 2017).

Empirical evidence supports the relationship between employees' commitment and psychological contract congruence (Birtch *et al.*, 2016; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Thus, when there is high congruence and perceived distributive justice, employees feel greater commitment to the organization (Kim *et al.*, 2017; Ponnu and Chuah, 2010).

In this sense, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H2-The work effort (price) that employees are willing to make in exchange for the offering has a positive relationship with their organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective and values commitment and decreased need commitment).*

#### *Place and employees' organizational commitment*

The company makes its product available and accessible to employees through multiple channels. For this distribution to occur, organizational structure and leadership both play a fundamental role (Quintanilla, 1991).

The model used in this study understands structure and transformative leadership as conduits for distributing an organization's product to its employees. Specifically, the organizational structure should facilitate employee's participation and empowerment, encompassing their



suggestions, ideas, opinions, improvements, and anything that contributes to optimizing the company's services and fostering the professional and personal development of its workforce, as well as their commitment (Kim and Shing, 2019).

The organizational structure makes the organizational chart and framework explicit and establishes the channels through which strategic decisions flow (Bower, 1970; Fernández Ríos *et al.*, 2001). Different authors have shown how this structure indirectly influences employees' commitment by promoting satisfactory work forms or environments (De Villiers and Stander, 2011; Ferreira *et al.*, 2006).

Nevertheless, the adaptation of the organizational structure alone cannot effectively disseminate the employer's product. An organization evolving towards increased participation must concurrently cultivate a dialogue with its customers (employees), who seek not only to "earn a living" but also to express their personalities and derive satisfaction from their tasks and occupations. Implementing these dynamics in the organization also requires a leadership style consistent with this objective, with the transformational approach (Avolio and Bass, 2002; Bass, 1998; Bass and Avolio, 1994) being a case in point. Transformational leaders communicate a clear vision, inspire commitment to that vision, and obtain their subordinates' trust and motivation (Avolio *et al.*, 2009; Bass, 1997; Emrich *et al.*, 2001; García-Guiu *et al.*, 2015; Hermosilla *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Shing, 2019; Wieseke *et al.*, 2009).

Based on the above, Hypothesis 3 was established as follows:

*H3- The way in which the organization makes its product available (place), based on its structure and a transformational leadership style, has a positive relationship with employees' organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective and values commitment and decreased need commitment).*

This hypothesis is divided into two parts:

*H3.1. A clear, identifiable, flexible structure has a positive relationship with employees' organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective and values commitment and decreased need commitment).*

*H3.2. Transformational leadership style has a positive relationship with employees' organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective and values commitment and decreased need commitment).*

### *Promotion and employees' organizational commitment*

One of the most effective tools organizations have at their disposal to inform employees about the brand and influence their behavior is internal communication (Piehler *et al.*, 2017). Several studies carried out in the last few years relate internal communication to employees' organizational commitment, always establishing a positive correlation between these two variables in different cultural contexts and economic sectors (Al-Borie, 2012; Alves *et al.*, 2015; Bakar *et al.*, 2013; Çoban and Perçin, 2011).

Based on the above, we hypothesized that:

*H4- Internal communication management (Promotion) has a positive relationship with employees' organizational commitment (increased exchange, affective and values commitment and decreased need commitment).*

Finally, it is important to explain that while we have articulated separate hypotheses for each component of the EB Mix for the sake of clarity, our objective is to test the combined effect of these components on each type of organizational commitment (need, exchange, affective and values commitment). This allows us to comprehensively analyze the impact of the entire model on employees' organizational commitment, as a main source for talent retention.

## **Methods**

To test the hypotheses, this study took a questionnaire-based quantitative approach.

### ***Participants***

The participants were employees of a leading Spanish company in the healthcare sector, with 50 branches throughout Spain. The study sample consisted of 310 participants (38.1% participation). The majority were women between 36 and 50 years of age, with between five- and 15-years' length of service in the company. One third of the participants identified themselves as managers. The general characteristics of the sample are shown in Supplementary File I.

### ***Procedure***

The general management of the organization was informed and, after obtaining the consent of the HR manager, an online questionnaire was sent to all 814 employees through the organization's intranet. Participation was voluntary, the confidentiality and anonymity of the

responses was always guaranteed, and all the subjects gave appropriate informed consent. None of the participants could be identified individually.

### ***Instruments***

*Employer Branding.* The Employer Branding Mix questionnaire (Rayón, 2022) was used. This questionnaire is based on previously validated instruments and some ad hoc scales, and it is theoretically grounded in Rayón et al. (2022), the conceptual foundation of this study. It evaluates the four dimensions of product, price, place (structure and leadership), and promotion. This instrument has 25 items, measured on a five-point Likert-type scale and ranging from 1 - Totally disagree to 5 - Totally agree. All fit indexes supported the five-factor model (RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .05; GFI = .82; IFI = .94; CFI = .93) and its internal consistency. *Employees' organizational commitment.* The organizational commitment scale from the validated Identification-Commitment Inventory (Romeo, Yepes-Baldó, *et al.*, 2011) was used. It contains four dimensions: need, exchange, affective and values commitment. The instrument has 12 items, measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 -Totally disagree to 5 - Totally agree. All fit indexes supported the four-factor model (RMSEA = .029; RMR = .049; GFI = .98; AGFI = .972; CFI = .994) and the internal consistency of the global scale (Romeo, Yepes-Baldó, *et al.*, 2011).

Supplementary File II summarizes the instruments used with examples of items, the number of items in each dimension, and their internal consistency, according to Cronbach's alpha.

### ***Data Analysis***

Once the adequacy of the scales applied to the study sample had been verified (absence of errors, missing values, and outliers), a descriptive and correlational analysis of the scales was carried out. The correlational analysis was executed using Pearson's coefficient. Given that most of the independent variables correlated with one another, the possible multicollinearity between them was analyzed (Neter *et al.*, 1996; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001).

To test the hypotheses, various multiple standard regression models (least squares and enter method) were run between the dimensions of EB and those of employees' organizational commitment, all of them obtained as the means of the items. Sociodemographic variables were included as control variables (dummy variables) in the regression models tested.

Finally, given that the results of the regression model indicated a significant relationship between the hierarchical level variable and need, affective and value commitment, we proceeded to analyze this effect based on mean comparisons (Student's t-test).

## Results

The highest mean scores were observed in the product variable and the lowest in price, the latter being the variable with the highest standard deviation. As for the dependent variables, the highest mean score was obtained for affective commitment, and the lowest for need commitment (Table I).

### INSERT TABLE I

Finally, the variables of the EB Mix model were correlated to analyze their inter-relationships. All independent variables correlated with each other (Supplementary File III) and for that reason multicollinearity among them prior to performing regression analyses was run. The tolerance statistics ranged from .36 to .66, and the VIF statistics from 1.51 to 2.75. Since these values lie within the desired range, we concluded that multicollinearity was not a problem in our regression analyses.

Subsequently, we proceeded to contrast the relationships between EB and employees' commitment (Table II).

### INSERT TABLE II HERE

In general terms, the four models tested were statistically significant, with an increase in  $R^2$  when the different dimensions of the EB were included in the regression equations, and with high effect sizes (from .32 to .57). Similarly, a significant effect of the hierarchical position variable was observed in three of the four models (no such relationship was found in the model explaining exchange commitment), with no effect on the rest of the control variables (except for a slight effect of length of service on affective commitment).

The results obtained partially confirmed H1. They showed that product is positively related to affective and value commitment, while no significant relationships with need and exchange commitment were found. H2 was confirmed, given that the effort a company asks its employees to make (Price) was significantly related to all dimensions of employees' commitment. The same result was obtained for H4. Internal communication management (Promotion) was associated with all four dimensions of employee's commitment to the organization.

H3.1 was partially confirmed, given that leadership style was related to need commitment and positively to affective and value commitment, with no impact on exchange commitment. Finally, H3.2 was not proven because the results showed that the structure of an organization does not affect employee's organizational commitment.

The results of the regression model with the control variables indicated a significant relationship between the hierarchical level variable and need, affective and value commitment. We observed that in general, at low levels of price, promotion, and place (leadership), managers scored higher than employees did. As the evaluation of the effect of the price, promotion, and place (leadership) on need commitment, as dimensions improved the differences became smaller until they almost disappeared (Supplementary File IV).

In the case of affective commitment, the four dimensions of the EB Mix followed the same trend (the higher their scores, the higher the affective commitment), with managers scoring higher than employees do at all levels (Supplementary File V).

Finally, in the case of the relationship between product, price and value commitment, there were no differences between managers and employees at low levels, with the difference increasing as the score in these dimensions rose. In contrast, as regards the promotion and place (leadership) dimensions, managers scored higher than other employees did at all levels of these dimensions (Supplementary File VI).

## **Discussion**

The goal of this research was to analyze the relationship between EB, based on the model developed by Rayón *et al.* (2022), and employees' organizational commitment. The results obtained confirm that the components of the EB Mix model (Rayón *et al.*, 2022) positively affect employee's organizational commitment.

Firstly, it was found that the value proposition a company offers its current employees (product) has an impact on affective and value commitment to the organization. These results raise the question of why the product does not affect the dimensions of need and exchange. Gavilán *et al.* (2014) point out that this can be explained by the fact that

people's commitment to their organizations is complex and very dynamic, which means that, in each organization, the identified antecedents have very different weights, with the possibility of new cultural, business or conjunctural factors appearing that have a relevant positive or negative impact on the said commitment (p.36).

Therefore, it seems very important to continually adjust the EB plan, throughout the employees' time spent in the company, so that the experience of working there remains positive and they want the relationship with the organization to last longer.

Nonetheless, beyond the above consideration, the product, if it is properly designed, transcends the purely transactional function established at the beginning of the employment relationship. In all aspects, it is important to point out that these results may have been influenced by the sector of the company from which the data was collected. The sector in question applies a remuneration policy where people with little time in the company, generally in the early stages of their professional careers, are paid less, with a salary scale established by the relevant collective bargaining agreement. Hence, salary is not a differentiating factor among companies in the sector. On the other hand, as the offering changes over time (through pay increases, recognition, greater rapport with management, greater knowledge of goals and objectives, etc.), employees develop a link with the organization that is more personal than instrumental, giving more value to those intangible aspects that were not identified as differential in the earlier stages of employment.

Concerning the dimension of price, it was confirmed that the work effort that the employees pay to enjoy the product (price) has a positive impact on all the dimensions of employees' organizational commitment. Therefore, it is a relevant dimension when a company management wants to promote commitment among its employees. The exchange relationship involving the Price is established from the beginning between the employee and the employer. The effort that the employee is willing to invest can be influenced in the long run by the commitment the employee develops in their relationship with the organization, in a feedback loop. This relationship can increase or decrease the effort the employee is willing to exert based on changes in the offering.

The abovementioned need for employees to be able to identify and understand the product links the two previous dimensions, product, and price, with promotion. In this sense, employees are more willing to work for a reward when the reward is known and recognizable, which means that it is essential to "promote" the reward among its target audience.

As regards the dimension of promotion, it was confirmed that internal communication management has an impact on the four dimensions of employee's organizational commitment, being significantly and positively related to all the dimensions of commitment (negatively, in the case of need commitment). Our results concur with those of Morgan and Hunt (1994), with

communication emerging as the main precursor of employees' organizational commitment, apart from its ability to influence employee behavior (Piehler *et al.*, 2017).

With regard to place, it was found that the transformational leadership style has an impact on employees' organizational commitment, with the exception of exchange commitment. It is important to note that we were unable to confirm the impact of organizational structure on employees' organizational commitment. One possible explanation is the way the structure is identified with the activity of middle management or the persons in charge: the clear definition of positions and responsibilities, and the decision-making system, is somehow "embodied" in the way managers work. It is not the structure itself that generates commitment but rather the way in which managers work (Bower, 1970; Fernández Ríos *et al.*, 2001). In other words, the structure establishes who assumes leadership, and in some way both components of the dimension of place are identified.

Finally, while we have articulated separate hypotheses for each component of the EB Mix for the sake of clarity, we have partially confirmed the combined effect of these components on each type of organizational commitment. The results indicate that the 4 Ps of the marketing mix collectively influence the affective and values commitment, while in the case of the need commitment, only price, promotion, and leadership style act as antecedents. Furthermore, in the case of exchange commitment, the explanatory variables are reduced to 2: price and promotion.

An emerging result of this research was the effect of hierarchical level on the relationship between EB Mix and employees' organizational commitment. The results indicate that hierarchical level has an impact on all dimensions of commitment except for exchange commitment. Managers emerge as coadjutant agents in the implementation of EB strategies in a company, and therefore management should pay special attention to their development as leaders since they play a fundamental role in transmitting the company's value proposition.

Precisely because of their different hierarchical positions, company employees perceive organizational identity in different ways. According to Corley (2004), senior managers tend to view identity in function of organizational strategy, while operational employees perceive organizational identity as part of organizational culture. Middle managers interact with senior executives as regards strategy, and with the lower ranks in the hierarchy in terms of cultural values and beliefs (Corley, 2004). Therefore, they see organizational identity as a combination of strategy and culture.

### *Limitations and future research*

This research is not without its limitations. First, the existence of causality cannot be affirmed, in view of the sectional design with a single sample taken from the private healthcare sector. In relation with sample the response rate may introduce bias, and the findings might not be generalizable to the entire organization or to other sectors. In this sense, the specific characteristics of the healthcare sector in Spain could have influenced the outcomes, particularly regarding the positive correlation between elements of the EB Mix model and employee commitment, especially in terms of affective and value commitment (Fernández-Lores et al., 2016).

In this context, the healthcare sector is subject to specific regulations and policies that can significantly mold the perception of organizational practices related to employer branding. These regulations play a pivotal role in shaping how employees establish a connection with the values and commitments of their organizations.

Moreover, healthcare professionals often embody strong values associated with patient care and well-being. The alignment of the EB Mix model with these intrinsic professional values has the potential to amplify its efficacy in nurturing commitment within the healthcare sector. It would be appropriate for future research to include longitudinal designs, since it would then be possible to consider the changing nature of EB over time, and to collect data from different organizations and sectors, and even from different countries, in order to analyze the extent to which these results are generalizable.

Secondly, it would be worth extending the analysis of the effect of the EB Mix model on the behavior of potential employees, as this would facilitate the recruitment of talent by organizations. In this sense, actual committed employees can act as brand ambassadors, facilitating the recruitment of external talent (Kanwal & Van Hoyne, 2023).

Thirdly, among all the introduced control variables, only the hierarchical level has shown a significant effect in the tested models. In future research, other potential moderating factors that might influence the relationships proposed in the hypotheses (e.g. individual differences, task characteristics, or external contextual factors) should be introduced.

Finally, it was found that the transformational leadership style has no relationship with exchange commitment, as expected. We suggest that future research should evaluate the impact of transactional leadership in order to find out whether this dimension affects exchange



commitment, considering that, with this type of leadership style, the employee-employer relationship involves an explicit exchange between the two parties (Den Hartog *et al.*, 1997).

### *Conclusions and implications*

Despite the aforementioned limitations, we consider this research to be extremely relevant, given that it can help organizations in the health sector to implement EB programs for attracting, recruiting and retaining employees.

From the results obtained, we can conclude that if an organization is capable of defining and effectively managing the four dimensions of the model – product, price, place, and promotion, this becomes an efficient tool for achieving employees' organizational commitment, particularly in terms of affective and values commitment. All dimensions of the model interacted with each other, either increasing the positive effect or correcting any dysfunction in the others.

Hierarchical position had an impact on all dimensions of employees' organizational commitment except for exchange commitment, and middle managers emerged as instrumental in implementing EB within a company. This has important implications, as the management must pay special attention to training them as leaders since they play a crucial role in communicating the company's value proposition.

As shown, the main challenge when it comes to configuring the value proposition lies in the ability to clearly articulate and communicate (through internal communication and leadership style) the tangible and, especially, the intangible aspects. And, above all, the latter because their abstract nature must be adequately expressed in order to positively impact employees' dynamic reality from an EB perspective.

Therefore, it implies that each organization must decide for itself what kind of connection it wants to establish with its employees and look at what tools it has available for that purpose. In this respect, the EB Mix model is proposed as a useful tool to help HR managers promote commitment among all the members of the organization.

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